DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 020 PS 021 194

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TITLE Children in Crisis: Ideas for Child Care Professionals as Citizens.
PUB DATE Sep 92
NOTE 23p.; Expanded version of paper presented at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library Conference, "Our Children in Crisis: A Call to Conscience" (Austin, TX, September 18-19, 1992).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Activism; *Child Caregivers; Child Health; *Child Welfare; *Citizen Participation; Disadvantaged Youth; Early Childhood Education; Early Parenthood; *Educational Improvement; Elementary Education; *Health Promotion; Minority Group Children; Outreach Programs; Parent Participation; Wages
IDENTIFIERS *Professional Concerns

ABSTRACT

Children in America are in crisis. As citizens, child care professionals can write letters to and apply political pressure on elected officials, galvanizing them to improve the lives of young children and their families. In the field of education, action is needed to: (1) provide human development curricula in elementary schools; (2) link education and health in life science training; (3) encourage parent and student involvement in schools; (4) provide more child development courses for licensed professionals; (5) adapt public schools as child care sites; and (6) encourage business and school partnerships. In the area of infant and prenatal care, child care professionals can work to ensure prenatal care; focus on minority males when they are infants and toddlers; teach young boys about babies; help prevent unwanted pregnancies; provide partnering help for mothers in labor; organize outreach home visitation programs throughout the nation; attach health care centers to child care centers; work with the boyfriends of pregnant girls; teach child development skills to workers in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program; and support federal tracking of fathers for child support. In addition, worthy wages for child care workers should be championed. Political involvement is needed to promote the quality of life for children in America. (MM)

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Children in Crisis: Ideas for Child Care Professionals As Citizens

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Running head: Children in crisis

Expanded version of an invited presentation at the conference "Our Children in Crisis: A call to conscience: Sponsored by the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, The University of Texas at Austin, Sept. 18-19, 1992.

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CHILDREN IN CRISIS: IDEAS FOR CHILD CARE PROFESSIONALS AS CITIZENS

Children in America are in crisis. Between 1986 and 1991, the number of children in foster care jumped from 280,000 to 430,000. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 14.3 million children in American are living in poverty - more than one in four children under six. Nearly a half-million babies born in 1991 were exposed to drugs in the womb, and many more are born to mothers who drink and smoke while pregnant (Angle, 1993; Children's Defense Fund, 1992; Huston, 1992). From 1970 to 1988 the number of out-of-wedlock births jumped by 61%, and about one-quarter of women having their first child were teenagers (Mott Foundation, 1991). One-fifth of all murders in the United States occur among males 15-24 years old; for black males the homicide rate is seven times higher than for white males (Jones, 1990). Homicide, the leading cause of death among both male and female African-American youths (15 to 34 years old) is four to five times higher for Hispanic and Native American males than for non-Hispanic white males, and all youths aged 16 to 19 have the highest rates of victimization for rape, robbery, and assault - mostly by other teenagers (National Center for Clinical Infant Programs, 1992).

What can childcare professionals do as citizens to help in this crisis? Political actions are need on a broad front. Fighting for high quality childcare is only one piece of the rich

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patchwork quilt of helpfulness that we all must stitch together in order to increase societal and personal caring in our homes, organizations, and communities.

Childcare professionals contribute abundantly to improving the quality of lives daily for small children, yet the quilt of compassion is complex, and we must take into account **all** the other pieces that make up the fabric of our support for enhancing children's lives.

Indeed, some of the "pieces" society does pay for do not support children's lives. For example, millions of dollars are spent on spraying coca growing fields in foreign countries, without in any way helping children from dysfunctional or impoverished families in our own country grow up in more secure, orderly, nurturing environments so they will not be sucked into the drug culture as a relief from pain. A <u>systemic and systematic approach across domains</u> -prenatal, perinatal, postnatal, personal, and societal - is needed to heal the social body politic that condemns so many children to go to bed hungry, to live without medical insurance, to drop out of school, to participate in gang violence as their only way of life, and live with rage and cynicism as their predominant modes of feeling. Let us remember the old Greek myth of the hydra - if you cut off only one head, quickly another grows! We need to work at many levels to meet children's needs.

If we, not only as childcare personnel but as concerned citizens, want to enter the broader arena of fighting for

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political changes that will improve the lives of children and families, we shall have to focus on a **variety** of areas to ensure change. Most of us, including our President, know that more resources for expansion of child enrichment programs are needed. Head Start, for example, not only provides at-risk preschoolers with an early boost for learning but forms an effective health screening system as well. What are some other major areas requiring political consciousness raising and political work? Here are some domains where letters to those in public office and political pressure on elected officials can galvanize them to begin to improve the lives of young children and their families.

ENSURE PRENATAL CARE

Outreach work to find and serve pregnant women and provide early prenatal care is urgent. In some communities, Resource Mothers, who are energetic warm persons, have been recruited and trained to carry out this "Find- and- deliver- services" work. Such programs need widespread replication.

As a contribution to community well-being, some cab companies have donated free transportation to and from prenatal care clinics for poor pregnant women. Another possibility is to provide for prenatal and well-baby care within neighborhood store-front drop-in centers. Health and social support centers located in shopping malls in Hawaii have sharply increased the numbers of families who are willing to seek help. Every baby needs to be wanted and loved by a responsive, tuned-in caregiver. But services need to be located where folks will use them.

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PROVIDE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT CURRICULA IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Schools teach reading, writing, and computing. They also have team sports, car driving, and other extracurricular activities. Yet schools urgently need to build into the curriculum required courses in human development. How many children know a grab-bag of techniques to solve their social fusses and problems without hitting or calling names? Bessell and Palomares Magic Circle activities, Thomas Gordon's (1974)TET (Teacher Effectiveness Training), Myrna Shure's (1992) ICPS (Interpersonal Cognitive Problem-Solving) lesson plans for teachers in each grade, or Arnie Goldstein's (1989) PREPARE curriculum to teach prosocial skills are some of the available models for Human Development courses to help educators boost youngsters' empathy and interpersonal problem-solving skills. [1]

These skills are essential for adults in labor-management negotiations, marriage counseling, divorce mediation, and mutually satisfying resolution of parent-child conflicts. Surely they are needed to help defuse racial tensions in some schools. How can schools teach children to behave in kinder ways with each other, with family members, and with teachers? We need to give away the "secrets" that good childcare providers already know! Children need to understand that the sources of unkind or nasty remarks and unfeeling actions lie in people's insecurities and

[1] See Honig & Wittmer (1992) for an annotated bibliography that includes prosocial programs teachers and school systems can implement.

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lack of self-esteem. Human development knowledge would give youngsters insights and emotional ammunition to avoid destructive personal interactions and promote a climate for learning rather than fear.

Courses to **promote children's mental health** at all levels of school are essential. I personally believe that many school systems are reluctant to implement family life courses in schools because they worry that some families may be uncomfortable about coursework that will naturally include discussion of human sexuality and how pregnancy and conception take place. Young people will learn about sexuality! But where and how do they learn? Far better to have an expertly trained and caring teacher than a peer with misinformation and exploitative designs be the main sexuality "teacher" of a young person!

School-based help for families in crisis needs to be more available. Children living in very stressful family situations will have trouble concentrating on learning. Stress can come from external sources, such as homelessness, or from family sources such as abuse, or from interpersonal sources, such as a child's poor social skills than have resulted in peer isolation or rejection, which can lead to low self-esteem. Generally, families are referred to mental health clinics if there are acute stresses and dysfunction that impact on the child's functioning. But many families do not have the energy to seek services in different locales. Mental health support personnel working right **within** schools, as nurses and vocational guidance counselors do, can

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make a one-stop package of support services available (Steele & Raider, 1991). Collaborations for improving children's lives take courage, and agency intercoordination is essential (Kagan, 1991). Turf jealousies will no doubt require adjustments as any early "marriage" does! For example, a State Mental Health organization will have to collaborate with the Board of Education in many communities in order to provide such in-school services.

FOCUS ON MINORITY MALES AS INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Male toddlers and preschoolers are at special risk in many communities. We need to mobilize our resources for a more specific focus on the special needs for nurturance of young males from at-risk families. In some inner cities, over 85% of babies are born into fatherless families. We know that the aggravation of abandonment and lack of spousal support for the mothering person can fuel fires of rage in males as they grow up. Boys are the more vulnerable sex physiologically. For every 106 males born, the numbers are equal by the end of the first year. More male young infants die early. Boy babies grow up with more difficulties with enuresis, with dyslexia, and with attention deficit disorder and hyperactivity. Attachment theory research teaches that males are far more vulnerable than females to deprivation of affectionate maternal nurturance particularly as it affects their later motivation and competence for learning tasks. Researches further teach us that although compliance and cooperation rates may be the same for male toddlers, caregivers focus significantly more on male noncompliance and on male

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negative behaviors (Wittmer & Honig, 1987). All of us concerned with quality childcare must address the challenge of what we can do more particularly for minority male children in our society. Their dropout rates, drug rates, violence rates are very high. Can we enlist more community resources? Can we recruit "Adopted Uncles " to provide caring guidance and positive role models? Perhaps recruitment from senior citizen clubs can galvanize cadres of caring supportive surrogate grandfathers.

TEACH YOUNG BOYS ABOUT BABIES

In connection with reaching out to more males with nurturing, let us take opportunities to have young boys learn in special coursework to interact lovingly and competently with babies. Boys can soothe and care for babies and grow proud of their increasing ease and expertise as they engage babies in interaction games such as "Patty-cake". Under skilled and admiring tutelage, they can learn how to bathe, diaper, and cuddle babies for feedings. In the film " Oh boy! Babies" elementary school males learn, sometimes to their own amazement, how to become competent and delighted nurturers of babies whose mothers bring them on a regular basis into a special course set up for the boys in their school.

PREVENT UNWANTED PREGNANCIES

Far stronger efforts to prevent unwanted pregnancies and especially pregnancies to teenagers must be made. One of every five births in the United States is to a teenager. The long-term outcomes for teen pregnancies are bleak: lowered income, lowered

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school achievement, and increased probability of behavioral disorders. Strong community support can extend Planned Parenthood and community Family Planning programs that provide individual and group counseling for teenagers about responsible and safe sexual practices, about how their bodies work, and about options for contraception and abortion. Every teenage young woman needs to be given more of a chance to fulfil her own educational and life needs prior to pregnancy. Foreclosure on young lives means wasted lives. America cannot afford to waste the precious lives of so many teenagers to early pregnancy and to school dropout.

PROVIDE PARTNERING HELP FOR MOTHERS IN LABOR

In our highly industrialized nation, far too many mothers receive no prenatal care, have high rates of Caesarian deliveries, and have babies born prematurely or drug-addicted, with low Apgar scores requiring emergency rush to intensive care. We should lobby for a lot more use of trained *doulas* in our birthing centers and delivery rooms. Obstetricians Klaus and Kennell report that the work of such women, who are trained to stay with a mother in labor (to rub her back, speak encouraging soothing words, help and sustain her through painful contractions) results in far fewer medical complications in deliveries. Women with such help have far shorter labors and fewer than half the Caesarean deliveries compared with women who labor alone (Lieberman, 1993). A trained support person for every laboring mom should be budgeted into hospital delivery costs.

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ORGANIZE OUTREACH HOME VISITATION PROGRAMS NATIONALLY

A prescription for optimal childrearing does not come pinned to the diaper of every newborn. Some children are at risk for school and/or life failure because their parents need help with parenting. Home Visitation programs focus particularly on enhancing the mother's teaching and language-enriching skills with her very young child. Phyllis Levenstein's MCHP (Mother-Child Home Program) (1989), based in Wantagh, New York, is an excellent, comparatively inexpensive outreach model that is currently replicated in many communities nationwide. Missouri's PAT (Parents as Teachers) program is a statewide model making home visits available for parents of new babies during the first three years of life.

Home Builders (Kinney et al., 1991) is a nationwide program that reaches out with several intensive weeks of emergency case work in the home in order to teach PET (Gordon, 1970) transactional skills such as "I-statements", "Active Listening" and "Win-Win" negotiating techniques to fracturing families. These families are in imminent danger that Protective Services will place their child (often endangered by abuse and/or neglect) outside the family if this intensive help is not provided. In many states, Homebuilders prevents family breakup by teaching more effective personal management skills to parents and youngsters.

Preventive programs are far less costly than remedial programs in terms of community economic resources and in terms of

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potential human tragedy. Home Visitors who are trained in parent-child relationship skills, deeply knowledgeable about the stages of child development, and genuinely interested in each family member, support a parent's positive ego strengths and work amazing changes in some dysfunctional families.

For mothers who grew up in abusive and traumatizing families, more therapeutically skilled personnel may be needed to banish "the ghosts in the nursery". Selma Fraiberg (1987) pioneered her "kitchen therapy" model. Trained infant mental health specialists help a mother respond to her rejected or neglected baby not as the representation of past horrors from the mother's own childhood, but as a real human baby whom she **can** nurture with the long-term help of the in-home therapist.

Follow-up data from the Family Development Research Program (Lally et al, 1988), a federally funded intervention program in Syracuse, New York for low-income, low-education school drop-out mothers and their infants, revealed the long-term economic and social benefits of Home Visitation. The work of the Home Visitor during pregnancy and for the next five years, supplemented by high-quality childcare, resulted in markedly **lower rates and severity of juvenile delinquency** for program children (compared with controls) when they reached adolescence.

Trained Home Visitors need a variety of materials to bring to the home. Childcare professionals can contribute their creativity to creating games for families to help children learn. Parents peeling potatoes can listen to a cassette on "Tips for

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positive discipline techniques". Audiocassettes and inexpensive players can be made available for families who need more positive ideas about how to work with or discipline their youngsters.

A Home Visitor teaches child development, nutrition, book reading to young children, and parenting skills. But she or he also needs to provide a **booklending library**. Children who learn to read well in elementary school are children who have been read to a lot and had frequent, richly pleasurable family reading experiences. Child care facilities can help with suggestions for appropriate books. Picture books in the parents' own language, for a family to read to preschoolers will be especially appreciated by bilingual parents. The bilingual guide " Guia para los padres" of the American Speech and Hearing Association is a resource for Hispanic families that describes language games with babies. Other books, written in English at low literacy level (see Honig, 1982),suggest how a parent can use household chores and daily routines to boost a child's language/learning abilities so that TLC is truly achieved - tender loving care in a total learning center - the home!

ATTACH HEALTH CARE CENTERS TO CHILDCARE CENTERS

Children's health care can be improved if health centers are attached to daycare centers, as pediatrician Dr. Ralph Chase proposed for the Giant Steps program in San Angelo, Texas. Health centers can then serve the entire neighborhood. Funds obtained from serving the larger community would defray the cost of health care for low-income children enrolled in the childcare center.

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In addition, such clinics can provide spaces to permit care for mildly sick children whose employed parents may be haunted by fear of losing their jobs if they have to stay home too often with sick children. Best of all, such on-site clinics will ensure children from impoverished and at-risk backgrounds the frequent health checkups and **preventive** care they need, which ultimately will be a great cost-saver for the community.

WORK WITH THE BOYFRIENDS OF PREGNANT GIRLS

Social workers and trained youth workers stationed outside of pregnancy clinics must actively recruit young fathers-to-be who are the boyfriends of young girls arriving for their clinic appointments. Such youth need specially trained cadres of workers who can gain their trust and convince them of how precious and important fathers are for young children (Furman, 1992). Group workers can help them to become supportive fathering persons. These young men did awfully well at the making of the baby! They need help to follow through and become the positively nurturant, involved fathers their children need.

TEACH CHILD DEVELOPMENT SKILLS TO WIC WORKERS

The WIC (Women ,Infants, and Children) nutrition program is one of which America can be proud. Because of careful monitoring and nutritional aid, the rate of iron deficiency anemia in infants in many communities has been markedly reduced. Iron deficits lead to irritability, lowered IQ scores,and increased solemnity - in short, a mor difficult infant, more at risk for developmental troubles (Honig & Oski, 1986).

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WIC workers need additional training in child development in order to help parents notice more about baby's growth and development and in order to model appropriate and responsively attuned interactions with each infant during program visits. Babies would get a special "booster" - in more optimal interactions that their parents learn during the WIC visit.This kind of program aid would build on existing WIC services and be far less costly than new community programs.

Some babies waiting in clinic have glazed, unsparkling eyes. Their moms come for a checkup and sit silently rather than in engage in intimate cooing, turn-taking conversations with the infants. WIC workers with child development knowledge added to their repertoire can help modulate inappropriate parental patterns that lead to increasingly insecure infant attachments and angers over the early months of life. Learning intimacy and love are the supreme tasks of babyhood. WIC clinic personnel, pediatric residents, and clinic nurses in pediatric outpatient facilities need more child development knowledge and parent involvement skills. Their sensitivities are essential in the front line of defense against childhood difficulties.

FEDERAL TRACKING OF FATHERS FOR CHILD SUPPORT

A federally supported computer network program will improve the possibility of finding fathers who have not provided child support. Today, far too few fathers not living with their youngsters pay for child support, let alone provide the emotional support that divorce research teaches us is so desperately longed

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for by their children.

LINK EDUCATION AND HEALTH IN LIFE SCIENCE TRAINING

Most educational and human welfare service agencies are quite separate in communities. If training were provided for personnel who see their roles as both educative and sustaining of positive physical and mental health for clients, more integrated resources could be brought to bear to help multi-problem families. Case managers for handicapped infants and toddlers are a good example of such a blended role. They coordinate efforts for service for the entire family. Their work extends beyond finding medical, educative, and therapeutic resources to aid the family. They are also concerned with the family's ability to cope with the stressor of a disabled child. More flexibility in roles for other human service workers could be helpful for families in stress whose children were normal at birth.

ENCOURAGE KOHLBERGIAN JUST COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS

Some children run home with stomach aches from their school after the last class, because they are so afraid of being accosted for money or assaulted. Violence plagues many large schools. One solution is to empower neighborhood schools with vigorous and intensive parent involvement as Dr.James Comer has demonstrated so effectively in inner city schools in New Haven.

Enlisting youngsters in schools to create more "Just Communities ", as Kohlberg called them, is equally important. In the few schools where he piloted his ideas, children discussed issues of ethics and justice with their peers. They were more

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likely to evolve higher levels of reasoning about moral issues, such as what to do about locker thefts, or peer littering of school grounds. Schools that set up ongoing peer round tables can produce students who become responsible for thinking through their own responses to ethical issues relevant to their own school lives. Just communities of teachers and students together can best create solutions to school problems such as thefts or threats.

LICENSED PROFESSIONALS NEED MORE CHILD DEVELOPMENT COURSES

State Education Departments that license Schools of Education need to take a fresh view of licensure. Many teacher training programs require few if any courses in child development. Many child-development trained caregivers are ineligible for teacher licensure with preschoolers - an absurd situation. Child development courses should be required of teachers! Many youngsters bring multiple problems to school. The sorrows of these children cannot be met if we only prepare teachers to teach intellectual material in specialized disciplines. Young children who are abused, terrified, neglected, or rage-filled cannot learn unless a teacher has more than the required intellectual tools. Rutter's research in England teaches us that even if one teacher had a sustained kind and caring relationship with a high-risk girl, who had been reared in an institution, her chances of adjusting later in her own life as a parent were greatly increased.

Tough, defiant kids mask inner fears and grow dangerously

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hard shells in response to the chaos and harshness in their home lives. Teachers need more training in insights into family dynamics, insights into how to heal a child's broken spirit through empathy and genuine regard for the particular gifts of each child.

Students in Nursing Colleges and Law schools urgently need child development courses added to their curricula. Public Health nurses are often on the front lines in working with mothers of newborn babies. And in the legal profession, too many Family Court judges make decisions based on their own experience in family life rather than on the best professional knowledge and research findings. In painful divorce and custody cases, sometimes a judge is oblivious to the agonies of the parents or the child. I personally know one such case where the stepbrothers of a six year old were molesting the child sexually, but requests by the mother to protect the boy by curtailing unsupervised visits with the father were met by the Court's rejoinder " Well, you both have joint custody so you can work this out yourselves." Child development courses are essential for lawyers, particularly for Family Court work.

ADAPT PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS CHILDCARE SITES

Dr. Ed Zigler (see Angler, 1993) has championed the extended use of elementary schools as sites for parent education classes and for childcare for younger children. As long as the requirements for personnel are not bound by rigid licensure rules meant for teachers of older children, as long as Child

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Development training is required of staff, then such policies could be cost effective as well as providing community sites in which families feel comfortable and in which many more of their needs are being served.

ENCOURAGE MORE BUSINESS/ SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

In the past few years, some pioneer businessmen have adopted inner city schools. They promise that every youngster who graduates from high school will be given financial assistance to go to college. Industry-school partnerships need governmental tax incentives for businessmen in order to grow beyond their current status as personally creative, but rare, philanthropies.

CHAMPION WORTHY WAGES FOR CHILDCARE WORKERS

According to the National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, et al., 1990) the salaries for childcare workers in this country are extraordinarily low and the turnover rate is extraordinarily high. The crisis in recruitment and training (Willer & Johnson, 1989) and the critical issue of low pay combine to create a risk factor for the development of infants and young children in group care. Research reveals that **stability** of care is essential to promote the security of infants in group care.

As a nation, we can promote the quality of life for children in this country if we **reframe** our ideas about who are important persons in our society. The excellent infant/toddler care professional who boosts good mental health and the early learning career of infants is far more valuable to the future of our

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country than many stars of the sport or entertainment worlds. Yet the disparity in pay and admiration is astronomical! As a nation, we need to begin thinking about childcare providers as **professionals** whose wage scales need support. For too long the United States supported tobacco farmers whose products increase cancer and burdensome health costs. It is far more appropriate to support those professionals whose "product" is our most precious possession - our young children.

Government mandated and supported training for childcare workers already on the job is crucial. Such funds would pay for courses to increase the professional competence of warm, caring staff whose wages are abysmally low already. Just as the government provides grants for training young doctors, dedicated childcare professionals need such grants. Such support would go far toward upgrading the quality of care and staff morale of childcare professionals. Parents and providers together with other concerned citizens need to write letters to elected officials to urge implementation of that support!

The needs of children for our political involvement is perhaps as urgent as our personal and professional investment in their care. The commitment a society makes to its youngest citizens is a measure of the civilized values of that society. Such commitment would be a strong predictor of our society's future security, coherence, harmony, and productivity.

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